

OIL PRICES

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I rise to discuss oil prices, another problem vexing America. Everywhere I go in my State, people are just amazed that gasoline prices are through the roof. It is hurting everybody. There was a report last week that people were buying a little less food. You know you are getting down to the bare bones. Costs of everything could go up. Inflation, thankfully, has stayed low, but if energy prices stay this high for this long, they are going to get higher. What is so troubling is that we have the tools to bring the prices back down. The administration is fiddling while high-priced gasoline burns, if you will.

The No. 1 culprit is not the lack of refineries. Let me make clear: We do have a shortage of refineries. We have had a shortage for 15 years. The price has not been this high for 15 years. The price was a lot lower a year ago with the same number of refineries.

The problem is OPEC. OPEC has gotten together, led by the Saudis, and decided that the old ceiling of \$28 a barrel is no longer the ceiling. It is approaching \$40 a barrel. That is danger for our people, our economy. Senator CORZINE mentioned before, you see the great economic numbers and then you talk to average folks and they are having as much trouble paying the bills and making ends meet as they ever did before. My view of my role as Senator is to help those folks with their daily lives, not to just look at numbers in the newspaper and say, the numbers are good but, rather, to talk to average people and say: How are you doing? When I ask that, they say: Well, I would be doing a lot better if gasoline prices were lower.

We have a weapon. We have the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. The Strategic Petroleum Reserve's first and foremost purpose is to be there in an emergency. But we changed the law. I helped change it. It can be used when gasoline prices are too high as a temporary way of bringing them down. That is what we should be doing.

The bottom line is, instead of actually putting more oil on the market to lower the price, we are increasing the reserve as we speak, raising the price even further, even though the reserve is over 90 percent full.

I have a resolution I hope to introduce on some bill soon enough that asks the President to confront OPEC, not to play footsie with them, not to just tell the Saudis we understand.

I understand there has been a close relationship between many in this administration and the Saudis and the oil companies. It is sort of a Bermuda Triangle into which oil prices just go. But enough is enough. We should be putting a million barrels of oil out into the market for 30 or 60 days and watch, the price will come down.

I don't regard this as a partisan activity. I pushed President Clinton to do this for 8 months. He did it in October of 2002. The price went down and stayed

down. Do you know why it stayed down? Not just the new oil on the market, although oil prices are decided at the margin, but because OPEC knew they couldn't play around with us. When Spence Abraham, the Secretary of Energy, says we are not using the SPR, it gives a green light to OPEC that says: Raise prices as high as you want.

Is that leadership? Is that what the average American needs? Again, the average American is not looking at the newspaper and saying: Gee, the economy is great. They are sitting down at the dinner table Friday night and tearing out their hair about how they are going to pay their bills. The high price of gasoline makes it much worse. We have a way to combat it, to tell the Saudis and OPEC, the heck with you. And we are sitting there. This administration just sits and twiddles its thumbs as the price goes up and up and up. In fact, we send them little signals that it is perfectly OK.

The resolution I will be drafting—and I know my colleagues from California and Oregon are interested because we have talked about this—asks that we immediately, for 30 days, and then with the option for another 30 days, put a million barrels of oil out there. The price will come down.

I ask my fellow New Yorkers and Americans, don't think there is nothing we can do about high oil prices. As my good colleague from Oregon who led this debate said and as my colleague from New Jersey said, if we would simply use the SPR to reduce prices instead of now having it raise prices, the price would come down.

Again, our job as Senator is not to just look at these macrostatistics—that is part of the job—it is to figure out what the average family needs. And they need lower prices.

We can do it. I urge the administration, I urge this body to stop ignoring this problem, to get working on this problem, and bring those prices down in a variety of ways. What I have been pushing is the SPR, release some oil from the SPR. Prices will come down. It happened when President Clinton did it.

I hope this body will act quickly. Just because there is big oil, because there are Saudis, does not mean we should have to roll over. The President should be standing up for the average American, not standing up for the oil companies and not patting the Saudis on the back.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority leader.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, how much time remains on the Democratic side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Four minutes 45 seconds.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I will use part or all of that time. I know Senator BREAUX was planning to come to the floor but has now changed his plans.

RESPONSE TO PRISONER ABUSE

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I had hoped to come to the floor when Senator DURBIN spoke with regard to the need for a Senate response on the matter of prisoner abuse. Senator DURBIN related, as I understand it, some conversations I have had with the distinguished majority leader, and I confirm I have had some very good conversations with the majority leader about some of the actions Senator DURBIN outlined.

The majority leader shares my view, and I know he will want to speak to the matter himself, that the Senate needs to address this matter, asking Secretary Rumsfeld to come to room S-407 this week so we can ask questions directly and clarify why it was when they met with us last week we were not told of this information, and share with us as much as he and the Pentagon know about the degree of abuse, what other circumstances may be involved, and whatever has been learned so far through the investigation, and a full airing of the report.

He also indicated his view that the Secretary ought to come before the appropriate committees and testify with regard to these actions so the American people have a better understanding of what we know and what actions are being taken to address this circumstance so we can say without equivocation it will not happen again, and that we can reiterate to the world community this is not the practice, not the policy, and certainly not in keeping with the character of the American people.

Finally, Senator FRIST and I have talked extensively about the importance of passing a resolution this week denouncing this abuse and expressing our abhorrence on a bipartisan basis and sending as clear a message as we can to all the world community that this is unacceptable behavior, it is not in keeping with our practice, with our philosophy, with our character, and we want as much as possible to rectify what damage has been done and to assure those who would in some way make any effort to use this for their own purposes as an anti-American propaganda tool that that will not be tolerated.

This is not America. This is not the practice of our country. This is not the practice of 99.9 percent of the military serving so admirably in Iraq today. They deserve better than that. And to tarnish their reputation and the contributions they have made is abhorrent as well.

We need to make sure those points are made, but, first and foremost, we need to have a better understanding. We are shooting in the dark. We have no information other than what we have read in the newspaper, and that is not acceptable. Secretary Rumsfeld ought to be here, he ought to explain himself and the Pentagon, and we ought to say, after having acquired that information, as unequivocally and